



## **OLDER ADULTS AND SUBSTANCE USE**

### **The Elderly in Orange County**

Among all U.S. counties, Orange County ranks eighth in the total number of seniors over age 65. "A Call to Action: Strategic Planning for Aging in Orange County," County of Orange, December 1998.

### **Alcohol**

Alcohol abuse is the major substance abuse problem among older adults. "Substance Abuse Among Older Adults: Treatment Improvement Protocol (TIP) Series 26," Frederic C. Blow, et al, Center for Substance Abuse Treatment, 1998.

Alcohol interacts with at least half of the 100 most frequently prescribed drugs. Alcoholism in the Elderly: Diagnosis, Treatment, Prevention; Guidelines for Primary Care Physicians. American Medical Association, 1995.

Nearly 70% of annual hospitalizations among elderly adults are for problems related to alcohol. "Hidden Problems with Alcohol and Drugs," The American Society on Aging, September 1999.

According to the National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism, 6 to 11 percent of elderly patients admitted to hospitals exhibit symptoms of alcoholism, as do 20 percent of elderly patients in psychiatric wards and 14 percent of elderly patients in emergency rooms. "Addiction in the Golden Years," Jan Marie Werblin, October 1998.

In 1990, about \$60 billion was spent on alcohol-related hospital care for older adults. In 1991, almost one out of four Medicare dollars spent on inpatient hospital stays were for medical problems associated with substance abuse. Ibid.

### **Over-The-Counter Medications**

People 65 and older consume more prescribed and over-the-counter medications than any other age group in the United States. "Substance Abuse Among Older Adults: Treatment Improvement Protocol (TIP) Series 26," Frederic C. Blow, et al, Center for Substance Abuse Treatment, 1998.

A recent study found that the combination of alcohol and over-the-counter pain medications was the most common source of adverse drug reactions among older adults. Ibid.

In addition, older adults purchase at least 25% of all medications available without a prescription. "Prescription for Problems: Medication and Older Adults," The American Society on Aging, 1999.



ADEPT  
Alcohol and Drug Education and Prevention Team  
County of Orange Health Care Agency

## **Prescription Drugs**

Although older adults only make up 13% of the total population, they receive up to 30% of all prescriptions. An estimated 83% of adults over 65 take at least one prescription drug – 30% take eight or more prescription drugs daily. "Prescription for Problems: Medication and Older Adults," The American Society on Aging, 1999.

According to one study, over 600 million prescriptions are written each year for people over 60, an *average* of 15 prescriptions per person per year. "Drugs and Alcohol: A Guide for Older People," Hank Tweed. Do It Now Foundation Publications, 1991.

Older Americans, one study concluded, are almost six times more likely than other Americans to be hospitalized for adverse medication reactions. "Older Americans Most At Risk to Medication-Related Problems," National Clearinghouse for Alcohol and Drug Information, [www. Health.org/pubs/elderly/medreports.htm](http://www.health.org/pubs/elderly/medreports.htm), May 2000.